

Committee on Government Administration and Elections
Testimony Submitted by the Graduate Employee Union (GEU) Local 6950

SB350: An Act Establishing Juneteenth Independence Day as a Legal Holiday- support

Dear Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, and Members of the Committee Government Administration and Elections. My name is Carol Ann Jackson, and I am the Vice President of the University of Connecticut's Graduate Employees and Postdoc Union- UAW Local 6950. Our union represents over 2000 graduate student employees and 160 postdoctoral research associates at the University of Connecticut. Our local is one of the locals that comprise the United Auto Workers Region 9A which represents approximately 30,000 active and retired members in all the New England states, New York City, and Puerto Rico. I am submitting testimony today in support of SB350: An Act Establishing Juneteenth Independence Day as a Legal Holiday and urge you to vote in favor of this legislation.

Juneteenth Independence Day is an important holiday and should be recognized by the state of Connecticut. Juneteenth celebrates the freedom of enslaved people in the United States at the end of the Civil War. On June 19, 1865 federal troops arrived in Galveston, Texas to ensure that all enslaved people be freed, nearly two and a half years after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. Juneteenth is already recognized as a federal holiday and other states, such as Texas, Massachusetts, New York, Virginia, Washington and Oregon have designated Juneteenth as a paid legal holiday for state employees.

Juneteenth is tremendously important to me on a personal level as I am an African American citizen and feel that the recognition of such a historical moment is critical to social justice initiatives and healing in communities of color.

It is also important to the members of our local union. The GEU recently came to a tentative agreement with the University of Connecticut on our third contract. We proposed that Juneteenth be included in our contract; however the University asserted that such an addition to our contract would be nearly impossible to fulfill without the state recognizing Juneteenth as a holiday first. UCONN has committed to honoring the holiday and agreed to include the holiday in our contract if the state of Connecticut passes SB350. The recognition of Juneteenth as a state holiday will positively improve the state's ability to recruit and retain a more diverse and competitive workforce at UCONN. Recognizing Juneteenth as a state holiday would not only work to improve diversity and inclusion at UCONN, but in the state of Connecticut as well.

America is a country woven together by the fabric of various cultures and I believe it is of critical importance that our history and holidays reflect the citizens who live here and make this country so amazing. I urge the Committee to pass SB 350, which would establish Juneteenth Independence Day as a legal holiday for the state of Connecticut.